



Background Paper

Committee: Human Rights Council

Topic: Religious Persecution and its Effects on Society

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Religious persecution is the systematic, unfair, and cruel treatment suffered by a person or a group of people for religious beliefs or affiliations. Usually, it is exerted in two ways: by a State's government who persecutes the population of a country for practicing or affiliating a religion, or for failing in doing so. In 2018, any form of harassment to any religious group was reported in 90% of the countries around the world. Many countries impose severe and strict restrictions on freedom of religion. This happens because they believe that certain religions can threaten national security, sovereignty, culture, or other important national matters. Discriminatory laws are a way of establishing systematic persecution. The second main way is that applied by the dominant religious group against minor ones in a country or region. The victims of religious persecution often suffer from different forms of discrimination, exclusion, and violence. Arbitrary detentions, physical aggressions, torture, special prisons, and genocide are just some manifestations of religious persecution around the globe.

The Human Rights Council needs to address this issue on a global scale because its effects threaten human rights that belong inherent to all human beings, including the right to live. Freedom of religion is established by article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The presence of totalitarian governments (which create weak institutions), irrational nationalism among other complex reasons, make religious minorities in many regions of the world vulnerable to religious persecution. This issue can have devastating effects on societies. Families are separated with detentions, for instance. Violence replaces peace, generating instability, fear, and social division in society. It can also negatively affect other aspects related to the quality of life of those who suffer it, such as reduced opportunities in education and employment.

The origin of this issue is as old as religion itself. Throughout human history, people from different religions or atheists, agnostics, etc. have suffered several types of violence because of their religious beliefs. The Holocaust is perhaps the most tragic example of systemic persecution of religious and ethnic minorities, with over 6 million deaths.

Currently, one of the most severe examples of religious persecution is the one suffered by the Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities in China. Concentration camps have been built to eradicate their language, tradition, and way of life. According to reports, the Chinese government has detained at least 800,000 people and over 2 million Uyghurs are in “re-education centers”. They suffer from psychological abuse, with indoctrination programs, as well as physical torture and sexual abuse. Another example is the persecution suffered by Christians in many countries of the Middle East. A significant number of Christians in the zone have been dispossessed from their houses, they have also been murdered, abducted, incarcerated, and discriminated against, according to several findings. In this case, it is often driven by the state’s authoritarianism. The severity of the acts of persecution ranges from "usual" discrimination to genocidal attacks in opposition to Christians.

In 1981, the General Assembly established The Treaty Protection of Religious Rights, containing twelve articles. Article II states that prejudice and bigotry are damned and the affiliates promise to encourage and fulfill policies to guarantee liberalism, freedom of speech, faith, belief, and most importantly, to eradicate discrimination. Article VII obligates states to take measures to eradicate discrimination, including the promulgation and repeal of laws.

Religion-based NGOs, also known as faith-based organizations (FBOs), have been featured around the world in the past decades. A faith-based organization is not a legal term but it is used very often; it is defined as a group of individuals joined in accordance with religious or spiritual beliefs. Its mission is to help those in need; who are being persecuted regarding any religious beliefs.

In the report of the Union of International Associations in 2010, there were approximately 33,500 global NGOs in the world. Some organizations are: ChristiansSolidarity Worldwide (CSW), works in aid of those persecuted for being Christians, any other religion, or for lack of religion; Interfaith Youth Core (IYC) works to create mutual respect among different religions; Arigatou International is an organization working for the safety of religious children; European Council of Religious Leaders are multi-religion leaders that cooperate to prevent conflict regarding any religion; Interfaith Center of New York works to join and connect religious leaders and their communities with civil organizations, among many other organizations.

The Cross International is an organization that provides humanitarian aid such as food, shelter, medical care, education, comfort, and relief to people in poverty. The International Christian Consulate helps persecuted Middle Eastern Christians in Greece providing a safe place to stay away from the danger. The Mission Aviation Fellowship helps people in the hardest to reach locations. Pilots operate and deliver help to those that have been cut from the most basic needs.

In December 1966, the UN General Assembly opened for signature and ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which recognizes freedom of religion in its article 18. It was signed by 74 countries. Furthermore, in November 1981 the General Assembly passed the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. It has eight articles, in which freedom of religion and its practice is established.

Religious persecution is a worldwide issue that deeply harms society. It is a very complex problem that needs to be analyzed from different angles. Authoritarianism, weak institutions, and ignorance/misinformation are some of its causes. Victims suffer many kinds of discrimination or violence, which threaten not only their quality of life but their lives themselves. China and the Middle East are just some examples of the manifestations of religious persecution. Several organizations around the world aim to contribute to solving this issue, but certainly it is not enough. This committee needs to address this problem diplomatically in order to create a solution to protect religious freedom.

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